

August 10, 2015

Mayor Paul R. Soglin
Mayor's Office, City of Madison
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Room 403
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Mayor, Board of Estimates, and City Negotiating Team for Judge Doyle Square:

It's been three months since the City announced it was fast-tracking the development of Judge Doyle Square with JDS Development and Exact Sciences. Over that time, a preliminary development agreement has been negotiated, and the parties have been working toward a fully-designed project. We believe that having Exact Sciences locate its headquarters in downtown Madison can enhance the vitality of downtown. However, we are concerned that the parking accommodations being discussed will have serious negative impacts on downtown Madison.

Our concerns about parking specifically relate to the following elements:

1. Publicly subsidizing private parking so it is essentially free to the developer.
2. Failure to maintain Government East's parking supply during construction.
3. A parking ramp design that does not maximize the number of stalls provided and compromises the above-grade development of Block 105.

Our concerns are more fully outlined below, and we offer to help address these issues to ensure the Judge Doyle Square project can be a resounding success.

Free Parking for Exact Sciences

The City paying to enable free parking for a private company is unprecedented and unsustainable. It is contrary to the City's TIF Policy and long-standing parking and transportation policies, and it is unfair to all other parking users downtown who pay (and have paid for years) market rates to enable the parking infrastructure they require. As landlords, we would struggle to explain to our tenants why they must pay market rates for parking while another private company enjoys underground parking for which the City is covering virtually the full cost.

We remain supportive of the City using TIF and other public funding mechanisms to make construction of private underground parking feasible at market rates. But providing parking at no cost to a building bestows upon that building's developer an unfair advantage that is not available to other developers. Additionally, we have concerns that free parking sets an unsustainable precedent that the City will not be willing or able to replicate when, in the future, another private company wishes to relocate to or remain in downtown.

No Replacement for Government East

New parking in Judge Doyle Square should be designed and phased to ensure that replacement parking for Government East will be built before the existing ramp is demolished.

All businesses downtown – including our tenants – rely on public parking to some degree for their employees, clients, and visitors. A few businesses may be able to absorb the loss of public parking for 17 months, some will sacrifice to adapt as best they can, and surely some will simply relocate elsewhere. Everyone in downtown will be adversely impacted by the loss of parking during construction.

A Parking Ramp that is Far Less than Optimal

While the prospect of Exact Sciences locating its headquarters downtown has been described as a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity, the ability to build underground parking at Judge Doyle Square is also a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity. The recently-adopted Downtown Plan specifically recommends that existing above-grade parking be replaced with underground parking where possible. At Judge Doyle Square underground parking is more possible than anywhere else.

Judge Doyle Square is one of only two public sites in downtown where underground parking can be created. While underground parking is usually more expensive to build than above-grade parking, Judge Doyle Square enables such scale and efficiencies that underground parking on the site can be built for essentially the same cost per stall as above-grade parking.

Underground parking will allow the air-rights of Judge Doyle Square to be developed into better uses than parking, and the impact of doing so is significant. As a result of the current plan using air-rights for parking instead of hotel rooms, there is currently not enough air-rights volume to accommodate both parking and the 250 hotel rooms Monona Terrace wants. Putting parking above grade also compromises Exact Sciences’ future expansion opportunities on Block 105. Using prime real estate for above-grade parking means we are condemning the project – and ultimately the downtown – to far less potential than it can and must achieve.

Further, from what we’ve seen of the proposed parking design, it promises to function sub-optimally in terms of circulation and traffic flow. The current parking design has insufficient ingress/egress to accommodate the volume of parking users it will serve, and the design will create unnecessary traffic congestion by forcing traffic onto the streets to circulate.

We encourage the City, JDS Development, and Exact Sciences to address these design flaws so that the parking functions optimally without negatively impacting traffic throughout downtown.

Because, ultimately, a new headquarters for Exact Sciences – and the jobs promised to come with it – should be a healthy addition to the downtown environment. We certainly support the idea of adding 300+ professional jobs in downtown Madison, which would bolster the retail, restaurants, and other services in downtown that depend on a critical mass of people locating here. And we welcome any private company investing in downtown and sharing our belief that Madison is a special place to do business.

Downtown Madison can benefit from the Exact Sciences project being done in a way that maximizes the development opportunity, but downtown Madison stands to be negatively impacted if we accept a flawed solution.

Let’s get it right.

Sincerely,

Brad Binkowski, Urban Land Interests
Mike Slavish, Hovde Properties
Lee Ferderer, Fiore Companies
Bradley C. Mullins, Mullins Group
Greg Rice, Executive Management Inc.

cc: Common Council